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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

REPORT

OF THE

Superintendent of Public Instruction

ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,

THE

HISTORICAL BUREAU,

AND THE

CABINET OF NATURAL HISTORY

OF THE STATE.

C. THURSTON CHASE,
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, TALLAHASSEE.

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1869.

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,
Tallahassee, Fla., January 9th, 1869.

To His Excellency Harrison Reed, Governor:

I have the honor to hand you herewith my Report, together with suggestions on the organization of the Department of Public Instruction, the Historical Bureau, and the Cabinet of Natural History of the State.

Very respectfully,

C. THURSTON CHASE,
Superintendent Public Instruction.

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REPORT

OF THE

Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Two years after the admission of Florida into the Federal Union, the Legislature passed an act authorizing the establishment of a liberal system of common schools. This was soon afterwards repealed without being put into operation. Another was passed, which has since undergone various changes. It did not provide for free schools, nor impose any tax on property or persons for the support of schools. The school funds arose chiefly from the sale of lands donated to the State by the general government. The interest available for common schools never amounted to fifty cents a year each, to those who were entitled to its benefits under the law.

The act to establish common schools, etc., approved January 1, 1853, provides as follows:

SEC. 2. "That it shall be the duty of the Tax Assessor of each county, at the time of assessing the taxes of his county, to take the census of all the children of the county between the ages of five and eighteen years, and if any of them be deaf mutes, that he so state, and report the same on oath to the County Superintendent on or before the first day of June next, and each and every year thereafter; for which said service he shall receive five cents for each child reported to the County Superintendent; and, upon failure of the Tax Assessor to perform the duties herein and above required, he shall forfeit the sum of fifty dollars, to be deducted from the sum which the County Commissioners may allow him for assessing and collecting the taxes of his county."

No such enumeration was taken during the last year in the several counties, and it was presumed that some Assessors might not be fully apprised of this part of their duty. Their attention was called to the above section on the 22d of September by a circular from this Department.

THE SEMINARIES.

The act establishing two Seminaries, approved January 24, 1851, declares that their first purpose "should be the instruction of persons, both male and female, in the art of teaching all the various branches that pertain to a good common school education;" and next:

"To give such instruction in the mechanic arts, in husbandry, and agricultural chemistry, in the fundamental laws, and in what regards the rights and duties of citizens.

"Each county shall be entitled to send pupils in the ratio that it sends Representatives to the State Legislature—not to exceed such number as the Board may prescribe.

"Said Seminaries shall be under the direction of a Board of Education," etc.

The Constitution of the State declares that the "Legislature shall provide a uniform system of Common Schools and a University, and shall provide for the liberal maintenance of the same. Instruction in them shall be free."

The annual income of the Seminary fund amounts to about six thousand dollars. This is divided equally between the two Seminaries. It is apparent that neither of these institutions can be conducted as free schools on so small an income. The use of the Seminary buildings has been allowed to private parties to conduct schools temporarily until some further provision can be made by the Legislature for their support, according to the terms of the Constitution.

PREPARATORY WORK.

County Superintendents have been requested to ascertain the number of persons in their respective counties who, being entitled, would like to avail themselves of the benefits of the Seminary fund. They were also advised "to make such inspection in their respective counties as will enable them to judge where schools should be started, and to ascertain the circumstances in each case.

First. The probable number of youth who would attend.

Second. The size and condition of school house, if any. Furniture on hand.

Third. Expense of erecting a suitable school building.

Fourth. Amount that the people of the neighborhood would contribute in money, labor, or lumber, towards the construction of a school house where one is needed.

Fifth. Amount that they would pledge and secure towards the payment of one or more teachers' wages—as they might require."

This was done in order that they might be prepared to act at the earliest moment practicable.

Communications received from them express a desire to cooperate, most cordially, when their duties shall be defined by law.

OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF OPENING SCHOOLS.

While the new Constitution provides that the Common Schools

and the University should be free of charge for instruction, and while the funds were insufficient to make them free, and especially while the income of the Common School Fund could not be disbursed for the want of the data on which the law prescribes the apportionment shall be made, it is apparent that the schools could not properly be opened.

The principals of both the Seminary and Common School funds were expended during the war in "the purchase of arms, ammunition, and for other purposes." But the State, recognizing its obligations as custodian of these sacred trusts, will see that an amount be paid annually to these funds equal to that which would have arisen from the principals had they not been absorbed.

TEACHERS AT WORK.

It is proper to speak, in passing, of three classes of schools in which the teachers have shown much true devotion. They are:

First. Private schools conducted by persons of either race. The teachers have been poorly paid, yet many have continued their schools when they did not receive sufficient compensation to pay their board. Such earnest devotion should be remembered when there are funds to pay good teachers with.

Second. Schools opened under the auspices of the State. According to authority of the act to "establish common schools for freedmen," the superintendent of these schools purposed paying at least twelve dollars a month to each teacher while engaged; but the failure to collect the capitation tax on freedmen, left him without means to pay them. Many teachers have continued their work until they were driven from it, into other callings, to earn their daily bread.

Measures have been taken to ascertain the names and length of time persons were engaged in this manner, agreeably to the joint resolution of the Legislature at the summer session. Partial returns have been received; when complete they will be laid before you. There is at least a moral obligation on the part of the State to carry out the pledges originally made to this class of teachers.

Third. Schools conducted under the auspices of Northern benevolent associations. Numbers of the ladies who assumed the duties of teachers, were persons of wealth and high social positions at home. Coming at a time when the freed children were cast suddenly at the threshold of a new life, unused to the responsibilities and ignorant of the duties thus thrust upon them, they were welcomed with great joy, and labored with sincere christian devotion, amidst hardships and privations. The teachers have changed, but most of the schools are still maintained.

We have seen the labors of the true teacher reaching out and benefiting the fireside, the work-shop, and the plantation. Honest, earnest labor, rightly bestowed, is never lost. It may meet opposition, as it often does, but it wins at last.

PUBLIC SENTIMENT.

There is very great satisfaction in noticing the evidences that the public mind is in favor of universal education. At a convention of the Educational Association of Florida, held at Tallahassee, in 1867, the "Committee on the Education of our Colored Population" reported, through their chairman, D. S. Walker, then Governor of the State, that "some of our most respected white ladies and gentlemen in the State have taken positions in these schools, and besides the approval of a good conscience, feel that they have rather gained than lost social position by so doing. There is not a good man or woman in the State that does not feel the obligation of this high duty." The report concluded by "commending this great work to every christian and patriot in the land."

In the attempt to establish common schools, there will necessarily be some differences, but if the work be met in the spirit of enlarged philanthropy, as expressed in the above quotation, and characterized by mutual forbearance and a sincere desire for the good of each other, that which would otherwise be a most arduous and difficult task, will become the most interesting, replete with the happiest results to the State.

AID FROM THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATIONS FOR FREEDMEN'S SCHOOLS.

As the Legislature did not complete the passage of the school bill which claimed its consideration at the former session, and as it was apparent, after an examination of existing statutes on the subject, that the officers designated by the Constitution, and charged with the supervision and management of the educational interests, could not properly enter upon the work of organizing public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, by the concurrence of the Governor, embraced the opportunity which was thus afforded to visit other States, to inspect the workings of their school systems, and to endeavor to procure the speedy expenditure of as much as possible of the appropriation by the general government to this State for the construction and repair of school houses. This sum amounted to about seventy-five thousand dollars, in three annual appropriations, less than one-third of which had expended. It was also ascertained that the teachers who had been engaged under the auspices of be-

nevolent associations had mostly been withdrawn, and that the project of erecting a building for the accommodation of a normal school had been abandoned.

The first effort was directed towards procuring an immediate expenditure of the appropriation of the general government. The next was to induce other benevolent associations to revive the schools that had been discontinued. Both of these objects were attained. The government appropriation is being rapidly expended in a judicious and proper manner. The normal school building is being constructed. An additional endowment of six thousand dollars has been granted to it. Benevolent associations have undertaken to reopen and continue the closed schools, and to sustain the normal school until the State can assume its charge and support wholly or in part. It is also gratifying to state that private individuals of wealth have given pledges of substantial aid. The amount expended and donated by these several agencies during the present school year in the State will exceed forty thousand dollars.

ORGANIC FREE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

The question of organic school law transcends all others in importance that can claim the attention of this department. I have therefore made the study of the different school systems of the older States the subject of most earnest consideration, and embraced every opportunity to confer with eminent educators and school officers on the workings of the several laws, to ascertain the strong and weak points. Much might be written on the merit and demerits of the different systems. But instead of adopting that course, I applied myself to making a careful digest of the most approved systems of the older States, and conferred freely with prominent superintendents of schools and eminent educators on the practical workings of these systems, and have embodied the result of these investigations in a bill which will be submitted to the Legislature when desired. It is proper to state, however, that the framework of the school law of this State has been adopted as the basis for the above system. The changes in outline are but few, and the detail is made to correspond with the machinery of the existing laws to a considerable extent. It is far more comprehensive, yet simple and effective in its provisions and economical in its financial features.

The objections urged against the systems of the older States were that they too are cumbersome, diffuse, unwieldy, and expensive. All these objections have been obviated as far as possible.

The school is the link in our civil system which connects the State with the family. The provisions of any school act should,

therefore, be eminently just, and so plain that they may be readily comprehended by the common mind. Many matters of importance will arise under its operations. Good school houses, well located, and nicely furnished; competent teachers, frequent inspection and judicious supervision of their work; the co-operation of the citizens, and the adjustment of difficulties, all require candid, competent men, who have an innate love for education. To impart unity to the whole system, there must be some responsible head, who shall thoroughly identify himself with the educational interests of every neighborhood and watch over them with constant assiduity.

Before life and vigor can be infused into any—the best system, there must be liberal provision for meeting the expenses as they arise. Nothing should be done on state or county orders. Money in hand, with constant employment offered, will secure the services of the best of teachers. Their duties are arduous and their tasks are often the most exacting. They should be paid liberally according to the value of their services.

No subject presents such strong demends upon the wisdom of the Legislature as the education of the youth of the State. The taxes which must necessarily be imposed may seem onerous at first, and may sometimes operate unfairly. But when we consider the enormous sums raised and expended in other States, the demands upon the wealth of Florida will be trifling. New York expends annually upon her schools $5,000,000; Pennsylvania $3,500,000; Ohio $3,000,000. Other States come fully up to these figures proportionately. As the expense of starting the work involves the construction of school houses and the purchase of books, furniture, &c., it is suggested that a loan be made for the purposes of education, payable at some future day, when the youth who shall have enjoyed its blessings have entered upon the active duties of life, and may then share the burden, most cheerfully, of the expense by which they were enabled to take exalted positions in business, in society, or in State.

THE ORPHANS AND THE STATE.

There are thousands of children in the State who are left utterly friendless and dependent by the incidents of emancipation or the sad casualties of civil strife. These should be looked after with tender solicitude. To leave them in their ignorance would be to abandon them to grope their way along a dark and dangerous path, where the finest spirits might waste their energies in fruitless endeavors to rise, where the most would never aspire, or, attempting, would finally sink beneath an accumulating weight of discouragements. But the State, by laying hold on the hand of the poor and ignorant child, can prepare him for a

life of usefulness and respectability. The men of vast wealth in America are, with very few exceptions, those who were born in poverty; and the highest offices of the nation are filled with those who started in the race at the public school. A State can never know how much it loses in the undeveloped talent of its neglected children. If properly trained they may become the chief pillars of her strength. But there can be no assured peace, no guarantee of security to private rights and interests, no pledge of continued prosperity nor perpetuity to popular government, where the constituencies on which it rests are left to settle down into permanent ignorance and unmitigated depravity, as these must do unless the strong arm of the State goes down to their rescue.

AID FROM THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT.

Before closing this portion of my communication, I beg leave to invite your attention to a movement which is on foot in several of the Southern States. The object of it is to secure the cooperation and aid of the general government in establishing common and normal schools in these States on an enlarged and impartial basis. Petitions are being circulated, and receive the signatures of all classes. The object is so wise, and the stricken condition of these States is such that it is believed the project will meet with favor in Congress. The measure might be strengthened by some legislative attention to the subject.

The other duties devolved on the Superintendent of Public Instruction have received his careful attention. He has embraced very favorable opportunities of obtaining information on the organization of a Historical Bureau and a Bureau of Natural History. The results of those inquiries are embodied in the following remarks:

HISTORICAL BUREAU.

The Constitution provides that the Superintendent of Public Instruction "shall organize a Historical Bureau for the purpose of accumulating such matter and information as may be necessary for compiling and perfecting the history of the State."

The materials for a history of the State exist in various forms, and are widely scattered. Florida assumed a prominent position in the early history of this continent. The events that transpired at that period, together with the traditions of the aboriginal inhabitants are rapidly disappearing under the accumulating dust of time. No portion of the Union has experienced a more varied and, in some respects, highly interesting record. By its connection with the governments of the old world, a portion of its history can only be traced out from the documentary evidence in the archives of those nations. Other portions are

matters of record in the public offices of the State and the United States. They are in the languages of different nationalities, and require thorough investigation by earnest and competent historians. Some valuable works are extant on this subject, but none are exhaustive. It is respectfully suggested that the Legislature make such appropriation as may enable the Superintendent to execute the work imposed upon him.

BUREAU OF NATURAL HISTORY.

The further duty is imposed on the Superintendent of Public Instruction, of organizing a Bureau of Natural History, in the following words: "He shall also establish a cabinet of minerals, and other natural productions." The geology of the State is simple; its "minerals" are few; but the other "natural productions" cover a wide and most important range. Florida rivals every other State in the variety of its animal and vegetable life. Owing to its semi-tropical climate, and the position of its territory, being both peninsular and mainland, it produces a greater variety of valuable fruit and forest trees, vegetables, flowering and useful plants, also a larger number of species of birds, insects, fishes, marine shells, and reptiles, than any of her sister States. Very few of our citizens are aware of these facts, nor of the unmeasured wealth which lies so near them, and which, if rightly comprehended, is quite within the reach of all.

A complete collection which shall exhibit this infinitude of form and nature to the inspection of any citizen or stranger, would be of great value. But this is only a small, and the least valuable part of the work. Establishing a Cabinet of Natural History, includes, of course, the naming of the individual specimens, their proper arrangement in cases for inspection, and a suitable descriptive publication.

To enter upon this work in the manner which several States have undertaken a similar enterprise, would involve an expense beyond our means. The State of New York, for instance, expended about a million of dollars in the publication, alone, of some thirty or forty splendid octavo volumes on her natural history. But this was a pioneer work of great magnitude. The same results could be attained, at the present advanced stage of scientific knowledge, at a much smaller outlay. Massachusetts has expended upon engravings on the shells of that State some $7,000. California is now causing engravings to be made of the birds which inhabit that State, at a cost of $10,000. Iowa, Illinois, and other Western States, with far less variety to develop than Florida, have long since moved in these matters. Even Chili, a poor South American State, has brought out some thirty octavo volumes, in a very costly style, on its natural history.

Every State which has undertaken this work has derived great benefit from it, and Chili is now feeling the pulsations of a new life in consequence of her enterprise in showing to the world the inducements which she presents.

While in the North, I made it my business to investigate this subject, with a view to ascertaining the means by which the proposed work could be accomplished on an economical, yet truly practical and scientific basis. There are two methods by which this enterprise may be executed:

First. By employing a corps of eminent naturalists to work up anew the entire natural history of the State.

Second. To co-operate with some national institution, as the Smithsonian, which is already the depository of many thousands of specimens, correctly named, and to supplement the work performed by such measures as may be necessary for the completion of the investigation in those departments which are yet unfinished as applied to Florida.

Of the two plans, there can be no doubt that the second is the most economical, and the only one on which it would be advisable to enter. The first would involve, at the outset, an expenditure of twenty thousand dollars for a scientific library, and the employment of a corps of naturalists at many thousands more; and finally a publication which, to correspond with the work in its developed proportions, would cost some hundreds of thousands of dollars. No such an expenditure is necessary. The entire work can be accomplished under the second method for a less sum than would be absorbed by the expenses in one year under the first. By the latter it can be completed in four or five years, while a long period would be consumed by the former.

Under the organization recommended, there should be employed two collectors of specimens, one working in the Southern, the other in the Western and Northern portions of the State. Their salaries would amount to $800 or $1,000 a year each. Materials for preserving specimens would cost perhaps $400 annually. The specimens should be forwarded to the Smithsonian to be identified, named, and returned, and duplicates exchanged for others belonging to the State. The officers of the Smithsonian gave me encouragement that they would conduct this portion of the work without expense to the State. There yet will remain the arranging in cases of the collection, at such place as the legislature may direct. It is respectfully submitted that the State University would be the proper depository for this valuable collection, in order that the students attending may have the advantage which it would afford during their course of study. The publication of a descriptive work, em-

bracing in convenient form the several departments of our natural history, is, after all, the objective point, and the one from which the State would derive the most immediate and positive returns.

Such a work need not be a regular scientific monograph. This would be too extensive and too costly, without commensurate advantages. On the other hand, a series of popular manuals, sufficiently scientific, yet eminently practical, could be produced in a short time on those departments of our natural history which are already well understood by the scientific world. These manuals should treat in a concise and comprehensive manner of the known uses to which the objects under consideration may be applied in the arts and sciences, and their commercial values. In the instance of birds, animals and fishes, their qualities as articles of food, or for fertilizers, and the value of their products in an economic sense, should be stated. A similar analysis of the value and uses of the forest trees, tropical and semi-tropical fruits and vegetables, fibre-producing, medicinal and other plants. In connection with the department of entomology, a description of insects which are useful or injurious, their habits, and the means by which their ravages may be obviated. The value of a work of this kind is beyond any estimate that could now be made upon it. When completed it would be a depository of reliable information, to which capitalists and immigrants would resort when seeking investments for their wealth or homes for their families.

These manuals should be illustrated with good wood-cuts, drawn from nature, and printed and bound in a substantial manner. The officers of the Smithsonian Institution would superintend the preparation of the manuals, charging the State only the actual cost incurred. The expense of preparing the matter would vary in the different departments, but can be accomplished for a moderate sum. It is estimated by eminently practical scientific gentlemen, that the entire natural history of Florida may be worked up and published in the manner proposed, in four or five years, at an annual outlay of from three thousand five hundred to five thousand dollars.

Florida contains hundreds of thousands of acres of land that might be made as fertile as the famous valleys of the Nile or Mesopotamia, and to yield annual incomes of untold wealth, that do not produce to the individual a dollar of support, nor to the State a mill of income. No measure could be adopted that would tend to so rapid and successful development of these vast resources as the work under contemplation.

C. Thurston Chase,
Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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